REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY 2019 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor D.T. Davies - Chair
Councillor Mrs C. Forehead - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

J. Bevan, C. Elsbury, R.W. Gough, A. Hussey, S. Kent, Ms P. Leonard, J. Ridgewell, J. Scriven, G. Simmonds, A. Whitcombe, T.J. Williams, W. Williams, B. Zaplatynski

Cabinet Members:

N. George (Neighbourhood Services), S. Morgan (Economy, Infrastructure, Sustainability and Wellbeing of Future Generations Champion), Mrs E. Stenner (Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection).

Together with:

M.S. Williams (Interim Corporate Director of Communities), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community & Leisure Services, H. Jones (Waste Strategy and Operations Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

Also present:

Councillor K. Etheridge (Blackwood Local Ward Member)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor A.G. Higgs.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES - 8TH NOVEMBER 2018

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Special Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8th November 2018 (minute nos. 1 - 3) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. MINUTES - 11TH DECEMBER 2018

A Member queried the accuracy of Minute No. 6 (Report of the Cabinet Members) in relation to the discussion on the budget overspend for Pwllypant Roundabout (Paragraph 4) and sought clarification on the figures that had been cited during the course of debate on this item (although this detail was not included within the minute). The Member was advised to clarify the matter with the relevant Officers and Cabinet Member following the meeting.

Subject to clarification on the above it was

> RESOLVED that the minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 11th December 2018 (minute nos. 1 - 10) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

6. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBERS

The Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the reports from Councillors S. Morgan, N. George and Mrs E. Stenner, which provided an update on their respective portfolios, and had been circulated to Members in advance of the meeting. Questions were invited for each Cabinet Member following the verbal presentation of their report.

There were no questions for Councillor N. George (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services) following presentation of his report.

Councillor S. Morgan (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy, Infrastructure and Sustainability) responded to Members' queries surrounding funding sources for projects across the borough, the work of the Regeneration Project Board and letting opportunities at Oakdale Business Park, the new Sustainable Drainage Approval Body drainage function and the management of surface water, and permit applications ahead of implementation of new Civil Parking Enforcement powers. Arising from his update on the new lettings procedure across the Council's Industrial and Office property portfolio, the Cabinet Member also agreed to circulate further information following to the meeting in respect of vacant units at the Lawn Industrial Estate, Rhymney. In referring to the update for the Highways Operations Group, Members also praised the work of the Highways Team in keeping roads and side streets clear during the recent period of heavy snow.

With regards to the statement from Councillor E. Stenner, (Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection) responses were given to queries on the Council's tackling of fly-tipping, the Heads of the Valleys Masterplan, how the Authority is addressing air quality issues (including the forthcoming draft Hafodyrynys Air Quality Final Plan), and the latest situation in respect of the Council's Local Development Plan and the regional Strategic Development Plan. A Member referred to WG's White Paper on Improving Public Transport and asked if this would impact upon local bus subsidies and services. The Cabinet Member confirmed that they would arrange to circulate further information to the Member following the meeting.

The Cabinet Members were thanked for their reports.

7. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Cath Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) presented the report, which outlined details of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee Forward Programme (FWP) for the period February 2019 to July 2019. The FWP included all reports that were identified at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11th December 2018. Members were asked to consider the FWP alongside the Cabinet Work Programme as appended to the report and to suggest any changes.

It was agreed that a Forward Work Programme be arranged immediately prior to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting on 26th March 2019 (at 4.00pm) in order to consider and prioritise items for inclusion for the coming year. It was also noted that a report on Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre would be presented to Cabinet on 10th April 2019 and it was agreed that this be scheduled for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee on 26th March 2019.

Subject to the foregoing addition, it was unanimously agreed that the revised Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's website.

8. CABINET REPORTS

None of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda had been called forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

9. CHARGES FOR REPLACEMENT WHEELED BINS FOR RECYCLING

Rob Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services) presented the report, which examined the financial implications of a means-tested approach towards the charging regime for replacement recycling bins. This report had been requested by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 13th February 2018, following their consideration of a Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Kevin Etheridge regarding charges for wheeled recycling bins.

Members were reminded that in February 2015 the Council decided to implement charges for all replacement waste containers (excluding food waste caddies and containers taken/damaged by the collection crew). No concessions are currently available. The Charging Policy has been successful in putting a value and a sense of ownership on wheeled bins, thereby reducing the amount of misuse of bin supplies and helping to reduce the financial burden on the Authority. The issue of charging for replacement waste collection containers was considered by the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 13th December 2016. At that time it was resolved that the current charging policy for replacement waste collection containers be retained.

Officers explained that if a concession for recycling bins were to be introduced this would reduce the level of income received, and it is anticipated that this would significantly increase the numbers of requests for replacement containers. There would also be costs associated with changes to IT systems to allow for concession charge reductions, and an increase in administrative staff time associated with the variable charging scheme and the anticipated increase in requests. Members were advised that the Council's call centre

does not currently have the resource to administer a concessionary charging scheme and would require at least 1 more full time equivalent position within the Customer Services team to undertake the necessary duties. Therefore in view of the significant cost implications of introducing a concessionary charge, it was recommended that the current charging system with no concessions is retained.

Councillor Kevin Etheridge was invited to the table to make representations in respect of his Notice of Motion. He referred to a list of questions he had sent to Officers, which highlighted concerns and queries around the cost analysis undertaken in regards to the introduction of concessionary charges. Councillor Etheridge requested that the Scrutiny Committee seek a 6-month trial of concessionary charges for disabled, elderly, vulnerable and unemployed residents in order to ascertain the financial impact to the Authority. He also referred to the Equalities Act and the need to make reasonable adjustments and queried if the Council would be in breach of this legislation by not offering concessions across these particular categories.

In responding to all of the questions that Councillor Etheridge had submitted and any additional representations, Officers explained that they understood there to be no equalities implications around the current charging policy, as the policy gives equal parity to all residents by treating everyone the same. It was explained that unemployment is not a protected characteristic under the Equalities Act (although disability is a protected characteristic). In addition, there are difficulties around defining vulnerable persons and how the Council would determine who meets this criteria.

It was also reiterated that even for a 6-month trial, the Council would have to change its IT systems and employ an extra member of staff to deal with the increased workload. The Scrutiny Committee were reminded that replacement bin charges had achieved a saving of £60k per annum, and that in light of the pressing financial decisions being faced by the Authority as a result of its MTFP savings, this meant that alternative savings would have to be sought if the Council were to introduce this trial.

A Member queried the accuracy of the £23,731 generated as a result of replacement bin requests during 2017/18 when taking into account the number of requests set out in Section 4.1 of the report. Officers confirmed that they would make enquiries as to the accuracy of the data and respond to the Member accordingly.

Discussion took place regarding the Council's second-hand bin scheme, which offers refurbished bins at a lower charge. Officers explained that a stock control system is operated and that reclaimed bins are offered out as and when they become available.

A Member suggested that the number of bin requests across 2017/18 equated to 6 applications per day and that the estimated additional staff time to deal with these applications was disproportionate. Another Member queried why existing systems could not be used to process the means-tested applications, given that the system can offer pest control concessions. Officers outlined the specifics of the system and explained that it would have to be changed in order to incorporate means-tested charges and attach supporting evidence of concession eligibility. This is different to Pest Control concessions as in these cases, Officers attend site in person and visually expect supporting evidence at the time of carrying out treatments.

Discussion took place regarding the processing of abandoned bins, with it confirmed that these are reported by staff during collection rounds and the Council will then arrange for these to be collected, cleansed and recycled for second hand use. The Scrutiny Committee also discussed the amount of lost bins per year and queried whether GPS tracking would be an option to identify how and why these bins are going missing. Officers explained that a high percentage of bins are the target of vandalism and that the costs of GPS technology would outweigh any benefits.

Members were also reminded that the Council already offers assistance to residents who meet certain eligibility criteria via its Assisted Collection Service, whereby bins can be collected from inside the resident's property if they are unable to put their bin out for collection.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee support the report recommendation to retain the status quo in respect of the current charging system. By a show of hands (and in noting that there was 1 against), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the retention of the current charging system in respect of replacement recycling bins be supported.

10. WASTE REVIEW WORKING GROUP

Prior to the presentation of the report, Councillor J. Bevan drew the Committee's attention to the membership of the Working Group as set out in the report and asked for it to be noted that he had been listed as Chair but had only attended on two occasions.

Hayley Jones (Waste Strategy and Operations Manager) gave a detailed overview of the report, which advised Members of the outcome of the Waste Review Working Group, and sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee on the Working Group's recommendations.

Members were reminded that the Authority has been actively engaged in Welsh Government's Collaborative Change Programme (CCP) since 2015, with a series of reviews undertaken by Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) and their appointed consultants on a key range of waste management services. In March 2018, the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a cross-party Working Group to discuss and review the initial findings of the CCP. 11 meetings of the Group were held between 14th May 2018 and 27th November 2018, which included meetings with WRAP and their appointed consultants, and officers from neighbouring authorities, as well as several site visits.

Officers highlighted the key sections of the Waste Review as detailed in Section 4 of the report, which set the background to the review, provided information on the Council's Recycling Systems, described current and potential future Waste Transfer arrangements, and detailed a review of operations across the Council's 6 Household Recycling Centres. Members were also directed to the detailed appendices which included a number of WRAP documents and analysis in support of the information set out in the report.

It was noted that the Waste Review Group focussed their efforts on delivering realistic achievable outcomes in a practicable manner that meets the needs and aspirations of the Council's residents and had summarised their views as follows:-

- That the current kerbside collection system for co-mingled (mixed) materials be retained (subject to continuous satisfactory performance attainment and market sustainability);
- Officers develop education and enforcement solutions in order to improve the quality of materials and increase participation in recycling services;
- That the frequency of residual waste collections is reviewed in the light of actual and projected recycling performance following implementation of the Working Group's recommendations noting that there would be a lead-in time to any changes and having regard to the requirement to meet the statutory recycling target of 70% in 2024/2025;

- To review and update Waste Transfer arrangements in the light of any changes to collection systems.
- Officers to explore the feasibility of developing a working arrangement to take advantage of RCT County Borough Council's 'state of the art' recyclable treatment facility (MRF).
- To rationalise the network of HWRC sites by reducing from 6 to 4 through the closure of Penmaen and Rhymney HWRCs.
- To develop resource recovery initiatives including a ban on black bags and the provision of sorting and re-use areas at the HWRC sites.
- To explore the development (subject to planning) and funding of a 'super site' HWRC at Trehir on the Western (road) side of the existing Bailey bridge.

Members' attention was also directed to the financial implications set out in Section 7, which outlined the revenue and capital costs for the options considered throughout the report, along with any key assumptions, and provided details of Welsh Government capital funding allocated to the Collaborative Change Programme to 2021.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked Officers for their detailed presentation and the level of detail contained in the report, and noted the complexity of the Waste Review and the dedication of its Members and supporting Officers across the series of meetings held.

During the course of the ensuing debate, Members discussed the new proof of residency requirement across the Council's HWRCs with effect from 1st April 2018 and how these checks will be administered, and suggested the use of technology including facial recognition and automatic number plate recognition, together with alternatives such as the display of passport or photo ID. Officers explained that such technology would be cost-prohibitive, and that the purpose of the new checks are to establish proof of residency, not proof of identity, with these being introduced in order to reduce volumes of waste received due to cross border usage.

The Scrutiny Committee expressed a need for further information on the savings that would be achieved if Aberbargoed and Penallta HWRCs were to be closed instead. Officers explained that it would be very expensive to close Aberbargoed given that the lease is to 2030 with no break clause. The landlord could also request that the site be returned to its original state at the end of use. The savings for the closure of the Penallta site would be comparable to Penmaen and Rhymney. Members were asked to note that Rhymney HWRC only accounts for 8.9% of network tonnage and is the closest site for only 6% of households in the county borough, and there is greater potential for cross-border usage at this site. Penmaen HWRC is inadequate in terms of size for its level of use, has limited room for service development, can present health and safety risks at peak times, and is subject to neighbour complaint. There are potential further savings if Highways can use the vacated site, and the Penmaen site is also not a suitable site for the Council to implement its suggested policy change proposals. The Scrutiny Committee were also advised that Aberbargoed HWRC lends itself to reconfiguration and would be able to absorb any additional influx of traffic arising from closure of nearby sites, which would not be the case for the Penmaen and Aberbargoed sites. Penallta HWRC also has an opportunity to become a split level site and add capacity to its use.

A Member queried the logic for the proposed closure of the other sites given the level of operating costs associated with Trehir and the need for annual significant maintenance to the access bridge. Officers reiterated that Penmaen and Rhymney HWRCs are not fit for purpose going forward and that it is not a financial rationale that is driving the proposed closure of these particular sites. During the course of the debate, another Member also raised concerns about a rumoured new waste transfer station at Trehir, its impact on the traffic at the Pwllypant roundabout, and also referred to the need to avoid a backlog of traffic when the new proof of residency checks are implemented at Trehir HWRC. Officers gave assurances that the entrance will be monitored and measures put into place

to prevent any queuing forming along the A467 bypass. They also explained that there are no current plans to further develop in the current Trehir location and offered to meet with local ward members to address any concerns.

In response to a Member's query, Officers confirmed that there are no plans to introduce 3-week collections of residual waste at this moment in time, and also provided clarification on the location of Rhondda Cynon Taf's Materials Recycling Facility.

Concerns were expressed that the closure proposals would lead to an increase in fly-tipping and that the clear-up costs would far exceed any potential savings. Officers explained that the majority of fly-tipping is through the commercial sector who have to pay in any event to dispose of their waste at the HWRCs.

A Member requested a correction to bullet point 4 of the notes of the Working Group meeting held on 27th November 2018 and Officers confirmed they would arrange for this to be updated.

Clarification was sought on the reasons for cross-border use of household waste recycling sites. Officers explained that this is often because of shorter travel distances to CCBC sites compared to those in other authorities, and also because other authorities may have more stringent access procedures. The Scrutiny Committee discussed the spatial analysis that had been carried out for existing and potential new HWRCs to identify the 'ideal' location of HWRCs in the borough based on population distribution. Discussion also took place regarding the existing co-mingled collection arrangements utilised by the Authority and how these could change in the future in view of the WG's preferred Blueprint model.

A Member queried the likely timescales for any proposals arising from the recommendations of the Waste Review Working Group. It was explained that these would be the focus of separate reports to the Scrutiny Committee and thereafter Cabinet, and that relevant proposals and the need for decisions moving forward will be explored over the course of the coming year. Members were reminded that the closure of two HWRCs had been deferred in order to allow for the outcome of the Waste Review.

Following consideration of the report and in taking into account the views of the Waste Review Working Group, it was moved and seconded that the report recommendation be supported. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

> RESOLVED that arising from the recommendations of the Waste Review Working Group, Officers formulate future detailed reports for consideration by Cabinet as appropriate.

The Scrutiny Committee requested that their thanks to all members of the Waste Review Working Group and relevant staff be placed on record.

The meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 26th March 2019, they were signed by the Chair.

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CHAIR